Early Views of the Tennessee Valley

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Probably the first map to accurately depict the Tennessee Valley area was not produced until the 19th Century. However, there were many maps drawn before this time that attempted to show the interior of the North American continent. On most of these maps the Ohio River is rather accurately placed, but the Tennessee River often was not and the Mobile River was thought to connect with the Ohio or the Mississippi Rivers. To quote a 1762 source, the Mobile "waters a fine country on both sides. It comes down from the mountains in the country of the Illinois, (Indians) and, after a course of above 200 leagues southward, through some fine fertile plains and rich meadows, empties itself into the Gulph of Mexico." Thus, the Mobile was really thought to be a major tributary of the Ohio River, from the above description. A good conception of the Mobile extending to the Ohio can be seen in a map produced in 1697, in Amsterdam, by Johanne Bunone.

By the 1760's, however, some maps did correctly place the Tennessee as a major tributary of the Ohio River. Both the 1762 map of the settlements of the European Nations in America and the West Indies, published in "The Universal Museum or Gentleman's or Ladies Polite Magazine of History, Politicks and
Literature for 1762" and the 1763 map of the British Dominions in North America, by Thomas Kitchen in "The Annual Register" for 1763 show the Tennessee as a major tributary of the Ohio. Although the 1762 map leaves the Tennessee unnamed, Kitchen names the Tennessee the "Hogohegee" River. Yet there is no doubt this is the Tennessee.

All three maps are part of the authors' collection of 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th Century maps and are reproduced here as examples of early North American cartography and as early conceptions of the Tennessee Valley area, long before Alabama became a state. They are presented here in chronological order.